

Civil Penalties Increased for Violations of Agricultural Regulations

Undeclared and smuggled agricultural products just got more expensive!

Many people arriving in the United States don't realize that one piece of fruit or meat packed in a suitcase has the potential to cause extensive damage to U.S. agriculture. Forbidden fruits, vegetables, meats, plants, seeds, plant cuttings, soil, straw, and other agricultural products can carry a range of plant and animal pests and diseases that could damage our agricultural and natural resources and cost American taxpayers millions of dollars in higher food prices and eradication costs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for keeping these pests and diseases from entering the United States.

Those who violate agricultural regulations, either by failing to declare agricultural products they are carrying with them or by smuggling these items into the United States, will be assessed a civil penalty. With the passage of the Plant Protection Act and the Animal Health Protection Act, APHIS now has the ability to charge even higher penalties for these violations.

Civil Penalties

For travelers entering the United States who do not declare agricultural products, APHIS can now charge up to \$50,000 in fines. First-time offenders will be fined up to \$1,000 in penalties if the products are not for resale. Agricultural smugglers face civil penalties of up to \$250,000 per violation or criminal charges.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

Those enrolled in a Dedicated Commuter Lane (DCL) should be aware that, in addition to being assessed a civil penalty of up to \$50,000, violating USDA regulations can lead to the suspension of DCL decals and/or permanent removal from the DCL program. The Designated Commuter Lanes, which use an automated vehicle inspection system to screen pre-enrolled travelers who frequently cross the border and their vehicles, allow vehicles to move quickly through designated ports of entry. To obtain entry into the program, applicants must undergo an extensive background check, a vehicle inspection, and agree to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.

The same fines apply to any illegal agricultural products sent through the mail. Senders face civil penalties of up to \$50,000.

To avoid costly fines, declare all agricultural products you have when entering the United States. Mark yes to question #11 on the U.S. Customs Declaration Form. Do not send prohibited agricultural products through the mail.

Detector Dogs

USDA's Detector Dog program plays an integral part in safeguarding America's agriculture. The Detector Dogs, which include USDA's Beagle Brigade, work at U.S. border crossings, cargo warehouses, international post offices, and in most U.S. international air and maritime ports. These dogs sniff passenger luggage, cargo, packages, and vehicles for prohibited agricultural products that could cause serious damage to America's agricultural and natural resources.

Anyone who intentionally harms or interferes with members of USDA's Detector Dog program faces fines of up to \$10,000.

For more information, please visit the APHIS Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov or call 1-866-SAFEGUARD for recorded traveler information.

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.